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A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA: THE ENDANGERMENT OF RESPECT

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy**

In the School of Arts and Sciences
at Salem State University

By

Sophia A. Sortwell

Dr. Michael Mulnix
Faculty Advisor
Department of Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper aims to give a philosophical examination of social media and the threat it holds towards the moral development of children, specifically their level of respect. It is not maintained that these online platforms have the ability to change adult's current moral character. To support my claim, I will demonstrate social media's prevalence and importance in order to establish its ability to have a widespread impact. Moreover, I will present Confucian and Kantian moral doctrines in order to establish respect's importance. Subsequently, I will examine the nature of social media to exhibit how its means of communication make instances of disrespect more frequent and comfortable. Since, some may argue social media has the potential for Aristotelian virtue friendship, I have also provided a detailed analysis that demonstrates the contrary. I will also explicate further on the nature of social media, as well as human nature, to describe the impact that these platforms can have on individual's psychological wellbeing. Specifically, social media can cause an increase in narcissistic behavior, and potentially a decrease in empathy, which are contradictory to the notion of respect. Lastly, I will present the concept of the virtual self in order to explain how these psychological consequences may come about. Through these pieces of supporting evidence, it is maintained that social media is negatively effecting the level of respect people have for one another as a society.

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Introduction

Social media is negatively impacting the level of respect people have for one another as a society. The usage of the term respect is defined by regarding one another with worth and compassion as a human being, and in doing so, reasoning that they deserve to be treated well. As disrespecting one another is prevalent online, there is also a concern for the progression of how we treat one another in reality. More specifically, the concern is directed towards children and adolescents being raised with these social platforms since birth. Regardless of the developmental moral theory one holds, it is clear that a child's environment has fundamental impacts on their moral development. As social media is becoming a preferred and common way to communicate, its virtual environment has concerns towards children's development regarding their psychological wellbeing, the development of social skills, and sequentially their common respect for other persons. It is not maintained that social media has the capability to alter the current moral compass of adults. However, it is asserted that social media has the capacity to impact the moral development of children in a way so that it effects their level of respect for one another into adulthood.

In order to validate this argument, I will first demonstrate the prevalence of social media to deem that it is capable of having a widespread impact. Then, the importance of respect based on the ideologies of Confucius and Immanuel Kant will be established. Afterwards, the nature of social media in correlation to how we respect one another on these platforms will be analyzed. Some may argue that despite the effects social media has on respect, these sites may offer the potential to cultivate Aristotelian virtue

friendships. However, this paper will demonstrate how obtaining virtue friendship through social networking sites is impossible. Once a solid foundation for how social media influences our respect for one another is established, I will then go on to explain human nature and the nature of social media. It is asserted that as social creatures, social media is a desirable tool for us. However, the nature of social media is harmful to us by way of its threat towards social harmony, and through its highly addictive properties. Furthermore, the nature of social media also has effects on individuals' psychological well-being, which could be contributive to a lack of respect. Lastly, a discussion about the virtual self we create for ourselves will be inspected, and its implications for how we view ourselves and each other.

Prevalence of Social Media

In order to attest that social media could have a widespread impact, it would have to be quite ubiquitous in society. From its omnipresence in everyday life, and the statistics at hand, it should be reasonable to argue that social media is prevalent enough for it to have an impact on a macro-scale. Information from Pews Research center suggests that social media usage has been increasing rapidly. Among the entire U.S. population, Pews Research Center reported that the majority of Americans now use Facebook (Smith & Anderson). Furthermore, “78% of 18- to 24-year-olds use Snapchat, and a sizeable majority of these users (71%) visit the platform multiple times per day. Similarly, 71% of Americans in this age group now use Instagram and close to half (45%) are Twitter users” (Smith & Anderson). Pews Research center also confirms that the youngest adults demonstrate the highest social media usage. These statistics show that

social media is customary across America, but it is even more popular across younger generations.

Further data from Pews Research Center shows that 95% of American teenagers have access to a smartphone, and 45% report being online “almost constantly” (Anderson & Jiang). The number of teens who report being one their smart devices “almost constantly” has grown considerably in size from the years 2014-2018, rising from 24% to 45% (Anderson & Jiang). At this rate, that number is likely to grow more. Unlike the majority of Americans, teens prefer to use the platforms of YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, rather than Facebook. Nevertheless, these statistics show how ubiquitous and prevalent social media is in American culture. They also show the growing usage and popularity of these platforms across the younger generations. It is clear now that social media is common and widespread enough to for possibility of it to impact the moral development of adolescence, specifically their level of respect for others.

The Importance of Respect

Respect is important for society, as it is arguably the foundation for any moral system. Moreover, respect is crucial not only because it is our duty as moral agents to respect others, but also because it is fundamental element to our humanity. In Sandra Wawrytko’s *Confucius and Kant: The Ethics of Respect*, the author combines the theories of respect upheld by Confucius and Immanuel Kant in order to provide a successful theory of ethics that can be practiced in Western and Eastern societies. In doing so, she also delivers the very essence of why respect is important by combining Confucius’s concepts of humanity and socialization, along with Kant’s reasoning and rationality. Wawrytko’s work encompasses the idea that to be respectful is to not only to be rational,

but to also express the underlying features of our humanity. Thus, it is important to be respectful not only through Kant's idea that it is our moral duty to do so, but also because it is a vital element to our human nature. For, when one fails to understand to respect someone out of reason or out of human understanding, the other is able to compensate for whichever property is lacking. To help elaborate on the Confucian concepts discussed by Wawrytko, supplementary interpretations offered by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. will also be described.

To begin, Sandra Wawrytko discusses Confucius's Five Constants, or his humanistic virtues that place an emphasis on social morality. Two out of the five components will be emphasized and addressed, *li* and *jen*, for their role in explaining the Confucian concept of respect. Starting with *jen*, Wawrytko explains that it is directly correlated to the notion of respect. This symbol is explicated to be what *ought* to occur when two individuals encounter one another. The idea of the self in Chinese philosophy should also be noted here. In Eastern thought, the idea of one's self is often eradicated. Instead, there is no individuation between one another, but rather we are one another. Expanding on this philosophy, through life the aim is to become human, rather than we already are one. There is no idea of selfhood, but rather we are one self, one encompassed body, all seeking for common humanness. From this viewpoint, the way in which I treat others is how I am treating myself.

Continuing with Wawrytko's work, the usage and the meaning of *jen* has been interpreted over the millennia by many, often being translated into "love" (Wawrytko 238). However, the author explains that, "although usually translated as 'humanity' or 'humaneness', when applied in the *Analects*, *jen* seems to indicate an attitude of respect

toward self and others which qualifies the individual for inclusion within the civilized human group and, indeed, makes that social group possible at all” (Wawrytko 238). Given this impression, *jen* can be interpreted as a sense of respect for others and one’s self. *Jen*, what *ought* to occur when two individuals encounter one another, connects to the idea of treating others the way in which you wish to be treated. Further translation presented by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont should support this interpretation.

In *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. offer another translation of the character *jen*, or also understood as, *ren*. Their explanation of this character will elaborate on the concepts discussed by Wawrytko in offering an alternate interpretation. Ames and Rosemont, similarly to Wawrytko, state:

While “benevolence” and “humanity might be more comfortable choices for translating *ren* into English, our decision to use the less elegant “authoritative person” is a considered one. First, *ren* is one’s entire person: one’s cultivated, cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and religious sensibilities as they expressed in one’s ritualized roles and relationships. It’s is one’s “field of selves”, the sum of significant relationships, that constitute one as a resolutely social person. (Ames & Rosemont 49)

Here, the authors are translating *ren* as “authoritative person”, in order to establish both the mental and physical components involved in the process of becoming a human being (Ames & Rosemont 49). It is understood through these Confucian concepts that, “the human being is not something we are; it is something that we do, and become” (Ames and Rosemont 49). The way in which we become human beings is centered around our social roles to others, since Confucius had deemed that unless there are two human beings, there are none (Ames and Rosemont 48). Upon understanding the given

translations of *ren*, or *jen*, the role of *li* can now be defined and explicated on respect's importance.

In Wawrytko's *Confucius and Kant: The Ethics of Respect*, she explains Confucius's concept of *li*, or "cultural setting" (Wawrytko 239). When someone cultivates and masters the Confucian virtues of *jen* and *li*, one is able to behave properly in any setting. While *jen* guides someone into becoming a human, and their sense of duty towards their social roles, the incorporation of *li* facilitates this process. In *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, Roger T. Ames's and Henry Rosemont's interpretation of *li* is as follows:

Li are those meaning-invested roles, relationships, and institutions which facilitate communication, and which foster a sense of community. The compass is broad: all formal conduct, from table manners to patterns of greeting and leave-taking, to graduations, wedding, funerals, from gestures of deference to ancestral sacrifices- all of these, and more, are *li*. They are the social grammar that provides each member with a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity. (Ames and Rosemont 51)

When understanding the concept of *li*, it is recognized that personal refinement can only be achieved through discipline provided by formalized roles and behaviors (Ames and Rosemont 52). During social events, there are certain customaries, or rituals, wherein each person has a distinct role. To illustrate this, envision a wedding. There are traditional roles in American weddings that direct each person based on their relation in that cultural setting. The role that each individual possesses guides the actions that he or she ought to perform. The best man, normally the groom's brother or best friend, is in charge of holding the rings during the ceremony. At the reception, the best man and maid of honor typically give a speech based on his or her relationship with the newly weds. It is ritual for the guests to bring gifts to the wedding. These roles and corresponding rituals

in any given setting assists in achieving social harmony by understanding who we are, and how we are to behave. Confucius examines and outlines the way by which our humanity, our unique and emotional compositions, allow for social harmony when understanding and putting into the practice of concepts of *li* and *jen*. Respect is emphasized for its role in becoming human, guiding social action, and producing social harmony in general. We should strive to better our social roles, and to respect one another out of our shared humanness. Though it should be noted that the cultivation of *jen* and *li* are no easy task, and when our humanity fails to find meaning in respecting one another, our rationality should.

The importance of respect for Immanuel Kant is represented through his deontological ethics, driven out of the will and reason of an individual. Deontology deems that we *ought* to respect one another because we have a duty to do so. As Wawrytko explains, “rationality provides the common context of human interaction for Kant, just as *li* does for Confucius. Deemed the essence of human nature, Kant drew upon the rich resources of reason the way Confucius drew upon *jen*” (Wawrytko 249). Kant’s guide to engaging in the correct behavior is based on the Categorical Imperative, which is to act as if the maxim to our behavior could be applied as a universal law. Out of the Categorical Imperative, Kant concludes that we *ought* to treat others as an end themselves, and not as a means to end. Wawrytko elucidates:

The three main elements of the program for positive social interaction reappear in Kant: (a) the roots of respect, in this case directed at persons as rational beings rather than personae; (b) respect for the moral law, a product of reason as guided judgment; and (c) the ideal of moral conduct in the good will, personifying respect through the principle of humanity. (Wawrytko 248)

Kantian ethics provides that the importance of respect is ingrained in the rational being. Deontology offers a universal framework for moral behavior, guided by the dogma that a moral action is the one that is acceptable for anyone, anywhere to engage in. Thus, creating the paradigm of respecting one another out of the duty to do so, stemming out of rationality and good will.

It may appear that Immanuel Kant's duty ethics may suffice as a logical interpretation towards the importance of respect. However, at times our rationality fails us: In this case:

Confucius improves on Kant by injecting the optimism of ongoing progress for the individual, so that we need not rely solely on the a priori resources of reason or the inborn talent of judgment. In a realistic assessment of human nature or *jen*, Confucius acknowledges the complexity of human life which requires more than an appeal to reason alone. The guidance of social institutions and interpersonal experiences supplement rationality" (254).

The Confucian model is not as strict as Kant's, where one has either acted wrongly or rightly in a given situation. Confucius acknowledges the imperfection of human beings, declaring there is always room for self-improvement. Thus, when one fails to live up to their social role, it is not a complete failure since no one is expected to be a perfect. This sense of optimism allows for the opportunity to reflect on how to better oneself. The integration of Kantian and Confucian concepts of respect complement and balance each other, especially in the case where one is lacking. For when our rationality fails us, reason is not the only condition under why we ought to respect others, and why it is important. Confucius implements the the integration of the *li* and the *ren* in order to present the case of engaging in moral behavior, specifically respect, out of social and human cultivation motives. Also, the Eastern philosophical interpretation of the self instills the notion, or

allegory, that how I treat others is how I am treating myself. Nevertheless, personal refinement is not any easy feat to accomplish. Thus, when our social and human cultivation fails to offer the reason and importance of respect, human rationality is able to compensate in its place.

To briefly illustrate this, imagine a scenario where you have not fully cultivated the components of *li* and *jen, ren*. In other words, you do not understand a particular social role and corresponding behavior, or you are not able to consider someone as yourself. For instance, let's say that you are dining alone at a restaurant. While eating your meal, you hear a group of nearby teenagers loudly insulting your clothing and appearance, hysterically laughing at each remark. Their obnoxious banter not only bothers you, but the other customers around you. Suppose that you have never been in a scenario like this before, and are unsure of your particular social role and behavior. Furthermore, suppose you are unable to relate to this group of teenagers. Thus, in order to alleviate the situation, you use reason and the Categorical Imperative. In attempt to engage in moral action that can be turned into universal law, you calmly tell the group of adolescents that they are disturbing yourself and other patrons. You also clarify that if they do not cease their behavior you have no choice but to alert a staff member. Through the use of maxims, logic, and reason one is capable of navigating how to respect one another when the components of *li* and *jen* are lacking. Similarly, if one is lacking in the ability to rationalize, cultivation in these two components facilitates respectful behavior. Since, if you had not been able to rationalize, understanding *li* and *jen*, or treating those teenagers as representations of yourself would result in a similar outcome. As it will be

discussed further in this paper, the basics of respect learned from the Confucius and Kant are absent in many social media interactions.

The Nature of Social Media and Respect

The nature by which we communicate with one another on social media makes it more likely for instances of disrespect. Online interactions do not provide the same sensation, impression, and/or emotion felt from a face-to-face interaction. On social media accounts, there is the element of anonymity, which opens the possibility of one engaging in behavior one normally would not perform in the presence of company. Homophily and proximity are also factors that come into play in cases of disrespect. Humans tend to like others who are similar to them. As people, we tend to gravitate towards those with similar beliefs and values to us, and dislike those with contrary beliefs and values. Instances of disrespect are more frequent towards those who “are not like us”. Whereas, respect is given to those who are more “like us”.

Proximity is also a factor that comes into play when respecting one another. It is easier for someone to disrespect another person when there is a lack of face-to-face communication. In face-to-face communication, there are the elements of body language, tone, physical contact, eye contact, facial expressions, etc. Social media accounts have provided the emoji to compensate for these lacking qualities, however; they make a poor substitute. With emojis it is easier to misinterpret or misunderstand an individual. Nevertheless, it is easier to disrespect someone who does not have like-minded views as you from the comfort and solitude of your living room, rather than in a direct altercation. The nature of these online environments influence a lack of social harmony, especially during political movements.

Politics, although taboo to discuss in person, is a common topic on social media. These platforms are a source of gasoline for the fire that is the political tension in the United States currently. Social media platforms are outlets for political information, disinformation, and discussion. As a matter of fact, President Donald Trump uses his Twitter account often to express his thoughts and decision making processes with the world. Given the nature of social media, however, these platforms provide more likelihood for instances of disrespect towards individuals of opposing political beliefs. As previously stated people tend to like those who are similar to them, and are more likely to disrespect those of dissimilarity. It may be that these cases of disrespect increased significantly during the Trump era. A recent poll from NPR revealed that, “Roughly 80 percent of voters say they are concerned that the negative tone and lack of civility in Washington will lead to violence or acts of terror”, and “42 percent say the president is the most to blame, while about a quarter to a third say the media are the most to blame” (“Incivility Will Lead to Violence”). These statistics reveal that the vast majority of voting Americans feel that the current state of politics in the U.S. will lead to violence and terror. Furthermore, about one quarter to one third of this population feel that media are most to blame. Although much of this concern has been initiated by the president himself, social media has contributed to its pervasion through the high frequency of disrespect towards one another.

It should be noted again that it is not argued that social media has the potential to change the current characteristics for adults using these platforms. Adults who grew up in the absence of social media had their fundamental moral character molded by their interpersonal interactions. Thus, these individuals typically engage with others as they

always have. Social media may allow for more instances or possibilities of disrespect, but this component cannot effect their already developed moral compass and how they engage with others. However, children growing up in the social media era are having their interpersonal interactions developed even more through their online interactions, teaching them disrespect is a social norm. Social media has the potential to conjure unfavorable characteristics of adults that influence cases of disrespect both online and offline. With this in consideration, there is an immense concern for how this human interaction will play into the moral development of children and adolescence. An individual's childhood development is crucial to how he or she will grow into adulthood. With social media becoming a more predominant means of socializing, the nature of these platforms could be harmful towards the development of adolescents and children. Someone could dispute that although social media is harmful to respect, it may allow a potential benefit: the opportunity to develop Aristotelian virtue friendships. However, this disputation is wrong, and we must examine why that is.

The Inability to Obtain Virtue Friendship

It is argued that social networking sites do not possess the capability to maintain complete and true friendships, at least by an Aristotelian account. In order to present this case, Alexis Elder's article "Excellent Online Friendships" will be analyzed. Ultimately, Elder comes to defend her view that virtue friendships are attainable through social media by the shared life. She presents how Aristotle defines the shared life "by sharing 'conversation and thought,' and not 'grazing in the same field, like cattle'" (Elder 288). Elder concludes from this statement that any platform that provides for the ability to engage in conversation and thought should suffice for the shared life. Yet, this assertion

is a bit problematic. In Elder's response to six objections on her standpoint, she addresses concerns as to how social media may not be able to sustain Aristotelian virtue friendship. In doing so, she provides rather weak support to counter these objections and defeats the purpose of her paper. In presenting how social media cannot sustain virtue friendship, first Aristotle's understanding of virtue friendships will be briefly disclosed through Alexis Elder's work. Afterwards, criticism towards her interpretation of the shared life will be examined, as well as the six objections Elder presents directed towards her argument.

To begin, virtue friendships are the best form of friendship according to Aristotle. The ancient philosopher categorized friendships into three sections, "those based on usefulness (utility friendships), pleasure in each other's company (pleasure friendships), and valuing each other as good in themselves (virtue friendships) (Elder 288). Rather than valuing someone for their usefulness, or the pleasure their presence brings, a virtue friendship encompasses the mutual admiration of each other's character. These friendships are formulated out of the recognition of someone else's virtue, which can only be established when we engage in conversation and thought, or the shared life. In explaining the shared life, Elder chooses a quote from Aristotle to expand on her assessment of how any medium that allows for conversation and thought is capable of sustaining virtue friendship:

...whatever his existence means to each partner individually or whatever is the purpose that makes his life desirable, he wishes to pursue it together with his friends. That is why some friends drink together or play dice together while others go in for sports together and hunt together, or join in the study of philosophy: whatever each group of people loves most in life, in that activity they spend their days together. For since they wish to live together with their friends, they follow and share in those pursuits which, they think, constitute their life together. (Elder 288).

All of the activities that Aristotle describes as sharing one's life with another person require someone physically being with them while engaging in an activity. Previously mentioned, Elder explains the shared life "by sharing 'conversation and thought,' and not 'grazing in the same field, like cattle'" (Elder 288). Elder finds from interpreting this passage that Aristotle would conclude engaging in conversation and thought on social media would suffice as the shared life. However, Aristotle most likely meant that merely being in other's presence does not qualify as the shared life, but actually engaging in conversation and thought while in their presence does. Obviously, the wonders of technology and online activities were not a component of Aristotle's time. With that in mind, social media is arguably far from what the ancient philosopher considered the "shared life". Elder attempts in discrediting these opposing opinions by supplementing her reader with six objections to her case, in which she defends weakly and unconvincingly.

The objections to her reasoning are labeled as followed: The Privacy Objection, The Superficiality Objection, The Commercialism Objection, The Deceptiveness Objection, The Physicality Objection, and The Poverty of Communication Objection (Elder 289-292). Each of these concerns exemplify how social media cannot sustain virtue friendship, and further illuminate other difficulties with its usage. The first objection to go over is concerning privacy. Elder presents this case as follows, "Because social media facilitates highly public conversations, the intimacy characteristic of the best friendships would seem impossible on most common social media sites. Friendships cannot thrive without the capacity to confide secrets" (Elder 289-290). Her response to this involved two lines of reasoning. Elder first mentions how most social media sites

offer the ability to engaging in one-on-one communication. Secondly, she discusses how not every interaction between friends needs to be conducted in secrecy. Following these disagreements to The Privacy Objection, Elder elaborates on how other technologies are developed for private conversations, like email. Furthermore, she proclaims, “Secrecy may be necessary for friendship in the long run, but it does not follow that every exchange in a friendship must be conducted in secrecy, nor that the public parts of a friendship are any less important to the friends or the wellbeing of the friendships” (Elder 290). Yet, her reasoning is completely discredited due to the fact that communication by any means of online or wireless communication is not private.

Whether we communicate by email, text message, or through one-on-one communication on social media, our conversations are constantly subject to surveillance. Concerning social media, however, users willingly hand over their privacy in order to use these platforms. Everything that we post about ourselves onto social media is collected to make informative data for algorithms, that decide what friends’ posts we see, what advertisements appear, etc. Even our one-on-one means of communication are not private, as they are stored and owned by the means of whatever social media platform you are using (Richards 1938-1941). The process of making a social media account requires that a user accept a long, and meticulous list of terms and agreements. Upon accepting these conditions, the usage of social media platforms provides no means of privacy, or secrecy, which Elder even deems important in the long-run of a virtue friendship.

The second objection to discuss is the Superficiality Objection, which encompasses how posts on social media address everyone a user allows to view their

profiles. Furthermore, since posts are made to no one in particular, it makes the exchanges between people superficial. Elder's response is as follows:

Public postings may be directed at friends with a shared interest, even while conveying an implicit invitation for others to join in the conversation. These directed addresses may be quite specifically tailored to call on a friend's shared interests, character, sense of humor, and so forth, and simultaneously convey an implicit invitation for the like-minded to join in. Although public, links, stories, pictures, and videos can be shared because one believes a particular friend would like them, find them interesting, want to respond to them, and so forth, and the friend could plausibly accept these friendly tokens without finding them diminished for being communicated in a public forum. (Elder 290)

Many of the things we post on social media, as Elder noted, arguably do not adhere to the type of conversation and thought Aristotle envisioned to embody the shared life. Many users on social media share trivial bits of information towards their life. They may share a picture of their lunch, a funny comic, a tidbit about their child's soccer game, or commonly a photo of themselves. How often do people make posts that inquire about philosophical subjects, the discussions that build and mold our character? Even when we do engage in this conversations, the ones that concern our morals, our politics, our religion, our values; how are people reacting? Arguably, the majority of social media users do not share content that would stimulate rich and thought-provoking conversation. Furthermore, even when users do engage in controversial, but meaningful, conversation, they do not engage in a manner Aristotle would deem worthy of value. In replying to opposing opinions, others may simply deny or ignore the other's viewpoint in getting across their own, and/or disrespect someone in the process. It is not to say that the same occurrence does not happen in face-to-face communication. However, the environment of social media is what makes denying, ignoring, and disrespecting others or their

viewpoints feel easier and more comfortable. In turn, it disputed that instances like these occur more often on social networking sites.

The third objection to Elder's standpoint revolves around commercialism. Social media companies are not non-profit businesses whose sole purpose is to provide virtual environments for friendship. Instead, they make money off of *you*. The main purpose of social media companies is to earn capital, just as every other business in a capitalistic economy. They do this through their usage and implementation of advertisements.

Relating back to the points made regarding privacy and superficiality, social media sites surveil and collect all the data that a user places into its system, and selects advertisements based on the profile built for said user. In doing so, the aim is to please the advertisers, not the user.

In Elder's defense of this objection, she ends up contradicting her response to The Privacy Objection, offers a weak comparison to how other businesses operate, and points to the harm social media usage brings to children. Overall, her main response to this issue revolves around the consent that users give to be monitored. Yet, most people do not read through terms and conditions of a given website, and may not know that their content is surveilled. Furthermore, Elder discusses how social media offers no privacy what so ever when she says, "I take much more seriously the charge that friendships can be harmed by violations of privacy, and the trust friends place in each other. It is highly plausible to me that one of the bad things about, for example, government surveillance is the damage it does to friendship" (Elder 291). In order to avoid this, Elder suggests using a secured email or discussing this in public places, where there is also the risk of people eavesdropping. Yet, granted her argument is based on the premise that social media can

sustain virtue friendship, the ability to meet together in person does not adhere to this premise. Additionally, it has been noted that not even emails or text messages allow for absolute privacy. Most importantly, however; Elder admits that there is government surveillance and that it is highly plausible to cause damage to friendship, completely discrediting her response to The Privacy Objection.

Moreover, Elder compares how social media companies profit off of their customers, just as bars and restaurants. Although, at these places, I am giving my money in return for a good or service. In the case where you are not paying for a product, you *are* the product. In the event of a “Ladies Night” at the bar, a business is profiting off of me because I am willing giving them my money in return for a drink or dish of food. However, in the case of social media companies, I am not paying for the product that I am using. Rather these businesses turn you into the product by compiling your information, often unknowingly or unwillingly, to choose advertisements to display on your screen. Lastly, Elder recognizes how social media is unsuitable for children and adolescents when she says:

Because so many of my responses appeal to voluntariness, it is entirely possible that those traditionally considered incapable of giving voluntary consent, particularly children and youths, may not be well-suited to make good decisions about their social media usage, and this may have impacts on what children should be permitted to agree to— or what companies can do with their underage user base. (Elder 292).

Out of this statement, Elder not only further recognizes the lack of privacy by any means in using social media, but also points to how these platforms may be damaging for children. Children especially should not be using social media as they are not even of age to give consent to the terms and conditions of social networking sites. Furthermore, children can be easily manipulated, persuaded, or influenced through the usage of these

platforms. Thus, children should not be engaging in these environments as they invade privacy, surveil, and then use the compiled information to direct advertisements towards them. They are not assisting children's social skills and needs throughout their development.

The next objection to discuss concerns deceptiveness on social media. Many would say that social media cannot sustain true friendships since it is easy to be deceptive on these platforms. Yet, Elder counters this claim by saying that people can be deceptive in commonplace too. Someone can lie, represent themselves differently, or edit one's self for others in person. Elder claims, "Even in more ordinary and less sinister exchanges, we frequently use voice, tone, expression, and posture to elicit desired responses from our conversation partners and to subtly direct the conversation toward topics we enjoy and away from uncomfortable subjects" (Elder 292). However, this response encompasses the very aspect of communication that are absent on social media. With people that we know well, an easy way of noticing their deceptiveness is through all of these physical mediums of communications. Furthermore, I would suggest it is not as easy to be deceptive in person, as it is to be online. Social media alleviates someone of the theatrics they would need to put on if they wanted to deceive people in person. Yet, for Elder this is not of a concern, since deceptiveness can happen in person too. Furthermore, whether deceptiveness occurs at a higher degree online or not is not a concern of Elder either. However, *authentic* virtue friendships require that there is no deception. The ease and frequency of deception on social media should then be an obvious concern if these platforms are to sustain true friendship.

The fifth objection to discuss is The Physicality Objection. This objection is explained when Elder states, “As social creatures, many of our social needs may be met through online interaction—but some may not be” (Elder 292). Physical touch is a component lacking in online communication. There is arguably a significance that physical touch or simply proximity brings to any relationship. In circumstances of grief or an altercation, there is a difference between merely messaging someone “I’m sorry” and the comfort of another person’s embrace. Elder mentions how individuals, especially men, have their reserves about physical touch in a given relationship (Elder 293). Yet, even when physical touch is not wanted, maybe the physical presence of another person is what’s desired. Individuals who may not desire to have their hand held, or to be kissed, or hugged; may simply want the presence of another person in the replace of solitude. The desire for physical touch arguably stems out of a biological need, as chemicals like oxytocin are known to be released upon human contact (Gangestad and Grebe). Furthermore, physicality also factors in to the manner in which we communicate. There is no perception of another person’s tone, body language, tone, facial expression, etc. when communicating online. This can lead to a variety of issues such as miscommunication, or a lack of social needs required for meaningful connection.

Elder’s last objection to her argument is The Poverty of Communication. Here, Elder mentions several philosophers with opposing opinions to her view, including Shannon Vallor. These philosophers all point to the fact that, “something about the nature of communication online makes it impossible, or at best, significantly more difficult or unlikely, for friends to share thoughts and feelings in ways constituting an Aristotelian shared life” (293). In order to respond to these philosophers’ criticism, Elder decides to

formulate a distinction between sharing information about activities, and the actual shared activity of discussing about the same information. Given the current objection at hand, Elder suggests that it has two claims:

- (1) I cannot actually share activities with my friends, only talk about my activities with my friends; or (2) Even if such talk constitutes a shared human activity sufficient for Aristotle's sense of the shared life among friends, such talk is in principle impoverished when conducted via text as opposed to a face-to-face conversation and so is an inferior part of a friendship. (Elder 293).

Yet, Elder responds to this by suggesting multi-player video games and journaling encompass the shared life aspect involved in virtue friendship. Journaling, which is distinct from private diary writing, is valuable for introspection and reflection on one's self according to Elder (Elder 294). When others have the opportunity to respond to such journal entries, Elder suggests that this medium is one of which Aristotle would constitute as the shared life. Coming to her conclusion, she asserts that one must be a skillful writer to have a meaningful friendship on social media platforms. Elder mentions that not every social media user is skilled in writing, and not everyone is a great conversationalist. Moreover, she says that being a good listener and a good speaker are skills that provide for the best face-to-face interaction. Thus, writing is the skill that provides for successful online interaction.

However, Elder adds no helpful discussion as to why multi-player gaming should constitute as a means of obtaining virtue friendship. It is assumed that while playing a videogame that has access to a headset, players are conversing about the game at hand, and not about philosophical inquiry. I would not suggest that much of the conversation held while playing a videogame would meet the Aristotelian standards of the shared life. Furthermore, simply being excellent at communicating on online platforms does not

constitute to Aristotle's standards of the shared life. As outline by previous objections, there are other factors that are infringing, lacking, or completely lacking in communication on social media. Largely, there is a major issue with the aspect of social media that has to do with the surveillance and utilization of your personal life for capitalistic purposes. Firstly, there is no element of privacy. Furthermore, since social media's main purpose is to increase their profits, and not maintain friendships, their desire is for users to visit their platform as often as possible. To do this, the creators of social media sites have produced platforms that require someone to engage in self-promoting behaviors. The nature of social media instills the need for self-promoting behaviors due to its social implications in the younger generations. Not only do self-promoting behaviors not facilitate in friendship, but they also have other negative consequences that will be explained further in the progression of this paper. However, as outline by the aforementioned, social media cannot provide virtue friendships to an Aristotelian standard by the very nature of social media. Despite not providing true virtue friendships, people are increasingly joining and visiting these social networking sites. This is due to the nature of social media in combined with the nature of human beings.

Human Nature and the Nature of Social Media

As human beings, we are social creatures. We enjoy the company of others, and feel lonesome in long periods of solitude. It intrinsically feels good to be included, involved, or part of a community. Whereas, it feels hurtful to be excluded or left-out from a given community, group, or population. People enjoy conversation with one another, and especially enjoy talking about themselves. Furthermore, as humans we try to avoid painful experiences in life, and pursue the pleasurable ones. By our social nature,

receiving praise or approval from another person is a source of pleasure. It is to all these reasons that social media platforms are popular among Americans, and especially younger generations. These online environments allow for a sense of involvement or community. They are also an outlet for people to make posts about themselves, and receive praise or approval in the form of likes, comments, shares, etc.

Social media has become a dominant and popular way to communicate across the world. Today, many people tend to have more than just their close friends on social media. They may have acquaintances, family, coworkers, bosses, even strangers as followers or friends on these platforms. It has become a portal into individual's lives, where everything can be put on display for the world to see. A social media account is very much like an advertisement for a person. In this view, a person gets to market themselves in anyway they choose. A person also gets a review for how well they market themselves. This can be seen by the amount of likes, shares, or whatever symbol of approval that a social media platform has. These likes or shares are visible to all who are allowed to view a person's social media page. In a sense, social symbols of approval have become an indicator of importance, worth, popularity, and/or attractiveness. For the online social media user, it is more desirable to have 315 likes on a single post, as opposed to only receiving 15. This is desirable due to the fact that your life is on display to all of your followers or friends. The more likes that someone receives, the more accepted and pleasure they feel. Social media allows the user to have the world at the fingertips, with information and connections to people of all relations. Contrarily, that also gives the world a connection to you, and that puts a great amount of stress or importance to be perceived well by society.

Social Media's Effect on the Human Psychology

As social media has become more popular in society, more research has been done to understand its effects on an individual. So far, much of the research that has been done has addressed the negative psychological effects that social media has on depression and self-esteem. However, newer research suggests that narcissistic behavior can come about as a result of additive social media usage. Although the research on social media's effects on empathy are scarce, it is argued that the decline in empathy over the years is contributed, at least partly, to the usage of social media. It is proposed that the increase in narcissistic behavior, and decrease in empathy, as a result of addictive social media usage is what generates a decrease in one's level of respect. After analyzing the components of these studies, then we can dissect how the duality of narcissism and lack of empathy contributing a decrease in respect.

Many of these studies range in their definitions of addiction based on a quantitative scale, social media addiction may apply to more of the population when given a particular definition. Addiction is commonly defined in the medical field as any behavior that becomes excessive to the point that it interferes with an individual's functioning in daily life. Though, it appears that social media intrudes on many American's lives in a plethora of ways. It intrudes on our attention while driving, socializing, studying, and can even intrude our lives on a psychological level. By psychological, it is intended to mean that the activities that happen online can impact our psychological states and prevent us from functioning in our daily lives outside of online environments. The data on teen social media usage disclosed previously demonstrates that a growing 45% of adolescents are online "almost constantly" (Anderson & Jiang). To

be in constant use of a particular device should certainly constitute as an addiction. When given the attention to just how much social media impedes on many individual's functioning in daily life, what qualifies as an addiction may be more wide-ranging.

Upon establishing that addiction may be applicable in a more widespread fashion, let us now begin to examine research that illuminate social media's psychological effects in regards to narcissism and self-esteem. An article titled, "Grandiosity on display: Social media behaviors and dimensions of narcissism", Santokh Singh and her colleagues demonstrate the relationship between narcissism and certain social media behaviors. In defining narcissism, the researchers deem that, "Narcissism is a continuous construct, with extreme trait variations demonstrated in narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), characterized by a pervasive pattern of grandiose behaviors, excessive need for admiration, and empathy deficits" (Singh et al. 308). Within their research, they have found that a leading indicator of an individual with narcissistic tendencies is a high rate of "selfie" posting. Using a multidimensional approach, the researchers had their 124 participants, one fourth women and three fourths men, complete the Narcissistic Personality Inventory – 13, or NPI-13 (Singh et al. 309). The team also had participants answer questions in relation to "selfie" posting or sending, and other social networking behaviors or settings (Singh et al. 310). Afterwards, partakers in the study were assessed on their motivations for social networking. To summarize their findings:

While the variables underlying SNS behaviors are surely multifaceted, the present study provides further support for the associations between narcissism, selfie posting/sending frequency, and other self-promoting SNS behaviors. Individuals with increased narcissistic traits post/send selfies more frequently, rate their selfies as more attractive, spend more time on SNS sites, are more active users on SNS, and generally demonstrate more activity across different SNS. Among the three dimensions of narcissism assessed in the NPI, Grandiose Exhibitionism

traits exhibit the most consistent associations with SNS variables. (Singh et al. 311)

The results from this given study elucidate on how narcissistic behavior can be developed through the engagement in self-promoting behaviors on social media. Thus, not everyone using social media will find themselves falling into tendencies of narcissistic behavior. Those who use social media for purposes of maintaining friendships, rather than for self-promotion, will be less likely to develop narcissistic tendencies. However, it has already been established that social media cannot obtain true, meaningful, and authentic friendships. It may assist with gaining utility or pleasure friendships, but not meaningful virtue friendships. Moving forward, the data on empathy will now be disclosed.

In “Changes of Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis”, Sara H. Konrath and her team of researchers conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating the decline in empathy in college students. The definition of dispositional empathy used within this study is explained as “the tendency to react to other people’s observed experiences” (Konrath et al. 181). Given this definition, the study interpreted empathy scores based on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, or IRI (Konrath et al. 181). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index contains 28 sub-items within four different seven-item subscales that represent “different components of interpersonal sensitivity” (Konrath et al. 181). The four subscales within the IRI are as follows, Empathetic Concern (EC), Perspective Taking (PT), The Fantasy (FS), and Personal Distress (PD) (Konrath et al. 181). Between the years 1979-2009, researchers collected and examined the scores American college student’s IRI scores finding that “empathy has been decreasing in college students primarily since 2000” (Konrath et al. 187). The two components showing the most significant decrease from IRI scores are EC and PT, which

encompasses people's feelings of sympathy for other's misfortunes and people's tendencies to imagine other's points of view. In their discussion of why or how this decline of empathy is happening the researchers state, "we speculate that one likely contributor to declining empathy is the rising prominence of personal technology and media use in everyday life" (Konrath et al. 188). The rise in social media has caused a generation that has become infatuated with themselves. In elaborating this hypothesis they indicate past research's the negative correlation between narcissism and empathy (Konrath et al. 187). The authors proclaim that, "Young adults today compose one of the most self-concerned, competitive, confident, and individualistic cohorts in recent history. Not surprisingly, this growing emphasis on the self has also come with a decreased emphasis on others" (Konrath et. al 187-188). This study illuminates a general decline in America's overall feelings of dispositional empathy, which is conjectured to be due to the rise of technology like social media. In doing so, the authors reiterate the correlation between narcissism and empathy.

What can be gathered from the aforementioned studies, is that a lack of respect comes about as a result of narcissistic behavior and a lack of empathy. Narcissism, which encompasses a grandiose sense of self, entitlement, and a need for admiration is instilled by the self-promoting activities provided by social media. Narcissism, by its premise, contributes to deficits in empathy as a result from being egocentric. Empathy, which can be understood as reacting with compassion towards other people's misfortunes, becomes more difficult to experience when an individual finds themselves entitled and superior to others. Other's pains and sufferings do not stimulate the same response when one can only conceptualize their own grievances. Relating back to the importance of respect

outlined by Confucius and Kant, narcissism may impede on our rationality or humanity in respecting others. Alternately, a lack of empathy may do just the same. By these means, social media usage has the potential to lead to a decrease in respect for other persons. However, what comes to bring about these specific psychological consequences of social media usage is the formation of the virtual self.

The Virtual Self

The virtual self is the persona we create for ourselves on social media. It is the virtual representation of one's self that is compiled through a historical collection of photographs, statements, and other self-expressive forms of social networking activity. Research shows how self-promoting social media usage is correlated to higher rates of narcissistic behavior and decreased levels of empathy. The reasoning for this is argued to be through the formulation of a virtual self. As previously discussed, a social media profile is like an advertisement of a person. A user is able to manipulate whatever post, picture, or status to emulate whatever image of themselves they want to portray. This way, their friends or followers will award them with more symbols of approval that are received as sources of pleasure. There is a particular rush someone feels when they get a notification from their social media accounts. The pleasure of receiving this validation may be a motivator in itself to influence someone to continuously use these platforms. Although there are many other influencers to using social media, this one in particular is a concern for narcissistic behavior.

Narcissism is an egoistic admiration of one's own self. Social media has the potential to instill narcissistic behavior through the emphasis of one's self. This nature

demands that users share information about themselves, or make posts to initiate social interaction. Someone's personal profile is essentially all about *them*. As previously theorized, a personal profile is like an advertisement or marketing tool to describe a person. With that in mind, it is desirable to portray one's self to society in the best way possible, even if it isn't authentic. Furthermore, the usage of social media is continuous and omnipresent. Before social media usage was exclusive on a computer or laptop. Now, social media is accessible through smart devices, which 95% of American teenagers own (Anderson & Jiang). To stay relevant, and to continue to feel accepted, one must habitually post on social media. People are continuously visiting a program that is focused on themselves, with the component of a pleasure source to keep their usage unremitting. The nature of social media is causing narcissistic behavior by way of focusing an individual on themselves. There is an increasing and constant need or urge to be noticed and praised by society that centralizes one's focus on themselves.

Like the domino effect, narcissistic behavior decreases our capability to feel genuine empathy for one another. As we become more focused on the importance of ourselves and our image, the compassion for others seems to dwindle. Furthermore, the proximity element to social media may also play a role in how the capacity for empathy has decreased. It has been disclosed that the proximity factor to social media diminishes many crucial components of communication. Moreover, a social media account is merely a digital representation of one's self. Specifically speaking, it creates a virtual-self, which is potentially problematic for our social interaction.

The way in which people regard, respect, and interact with technology is different than we do with others. In relation to Kant and Confucius, "Respect always applies to

persons only, never to things” (Wawrytko 249). Technology is merely an inanimate, insentient, and material object that does not require the concern or regard like that of a human being. The concept of a virtual self seems to strip someone of many of their humanlike qualities, making communication seem less consequential. It creates the impression that someone is more so like an avatar, or video game character, and less like human being. Technology does not uphold any anthropomorphic qualities, therefore; it is not upheld to the standards to how treat other beings. The virtual self is an extension of technology, thus eradicating much of the humanness of individuals. It is almost impossible to have feelings of empathy for inanimate objects. I do not feel sorry for my stapler when it is jammed. I do not feel the pain of my wine glass as it breaks in the sink. Moreover, I do not feel compassion or remorseful in the death of avatar in a game like Call of Duty. Empathy is an emotion strongly tied to humanness. Given that the virtual self eliminates individual’s humanlike qualities, it makes a strong reasoning as to how social media is influencing a decline in levels of empathy, in addition to expressions of narcissistic behavior. Furthermore, the virtual self creates a demand and need to use social media for purposes other than simply maintaining friendships. The maintenance and relevance of a virtual self requires that one engages in self-promoting behaviors. Yet, given the nature of social media, and the component of the virtual self, maintaining true friendships may not even be possible on these platforms.

Conclusion

Social media is negatively effecting the level of respect we have for one another as a society, which poses great concern for the generations being raised with these platforms. I have demonstrated this argument first through the prevalence of its usage and

importance to society. Furthermore, the nature of social media has been discussed and has been found to blame for the many influences for disrespect. Since some may dispute that social media has the potential of offering Aristotelian virtue friendship, Alexis Elder's article in support of this view has been dissected and objected to in order to discredit her claim. Additionally, the nature of social media has been discussed in relation to human nature. As previously mentioned, social media is appealing to human beings for our categorization as social creatures. By nature, with consideration of our social needs and pursuits for pleasure, these platforms can become very addicting. Social media, by nature, also requires someone to engage in self-promoting behaviors. The addictive engagement in self-promoting behaviors on social media can lead to negative psychological effects, including increased instances of narcissistic behavior and decreased levels of empathy. The combination of these two effects, along with the previous contentions, are compelling reasons as to why social media poses a threat to the moral development of adolescents in regards to their level of respect for others.

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